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A
S E R M O N

Occasioned by

The Distemper now raging amongst
the **HORNED CATTLE,**

Preached at a

PARISH CHURCH

BEFORE

A great Number of melancholy Sufferers.

BY

A COUNTRY CLERGYMAN.

CAMBRIDGE:

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M.DCC.XLVIII.



HAGGAI 1. 5.

*Now therefore thus saith the Lord of
hosts, Consider your Ways.*

WHEN we labour under Misfortunes, under any Grief or Trouble, did we but *seriously* reflect upon our past conduct, and endeavour to deduce the unhappy Effects that befall us from their true and genuine Causes, we should then perceive what little reason we have to repine at the dispensations of Providence, and be so far from murmuring at the *all-wise* decrees of Heaven, that we should look upon all our Chastisements as the most just and necessary consequences of our own Guilt and Wickedness: And did We, under our present Afflictions, but give ourselves time to *consider*, we should very naturally argue thus;—If the Almighty spared not those, whom he stiled *his own peculiar people*, but called for a Dearth upon the Land, and upon the Mountains, and upon the Corn, and upon the new Wine, and upon the Oyl, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon Men, AND UPON CATTLE, and upon all the Labour of the Hands *; how

* Hagg. 1. 11.

much reason have the people of this Nation, how much We in particular of this Neighbourhood, whose Herds are swept off like those of *Egypt*, to examine our behaviour, and to search diligently, whether this Evil is not come upon *Us*, as it did upon *Pharaoh*, for the hardness and impenitence of our hearts?

Though God is so liberal of his gifts as to bestow them in the greatest abundance upon the sons of men, yet ought we always to look upon them, *not* as the rewards of our own deserts; but as Gifts and Mercies, the constant attendants of his Divine Benevolence. When we ascribe not the honour due unto his holy Name, nor retain a grateful sense of these his mercies, he is sometimes pleased to withhold them from us, in order to make us understand that they are his Blessings, and that it is his sole Prerogative to bestow them according to his good pleasure: And *this* he does that we may acknowledge him as the Author of our Existence, and pay him all the tribute of Praise and Thanksgiving that is due to him for all the blessings and conveniencies of life. Happy is it for us, miserable creatures, that the great God of Heaven thus vouchsafes to concern himself about human affairs; for were we to enjoy an uninterrupted

interrupted flow of worldly Blifs, *never* to suffer Losses, to endure Sickness, or any other Chastisements; we should be apt to run into the most dangerous extreme, which *Agur* so earnestly prays against when he says, *Remove far from me vanity, lest I be full and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord**? But, praised be the Almighty! he hath seasoned our Prosperity with the leaven of Adversity: He has poured down his light Afflictions to make us review our conduct and give unto him the glory, *who hath given us richly all things to enjoy* †. These are the reflections we ought to make under our present, or indeed under any other Calamities: But that you may the more readily fall into so just a train of reasoning, I shall endeavour to vindicate the ways of God to Man, and bring you to consider *your ways*, by shewing,

I. Who it is that is the Author of our Chastisements, and for what reason they are inflicted; and

II. What use we ought to make of them, and how we may promote our own real Interest by them.

* Prov. 30. 9.

† 1 Tim. 6. 17.

I proceed then

I. To shew who it is that is the Author of our Chastisements, and for what reason they are inflicted.

God, in that he created mankind, has a right of Dominion over them ; and, if his Providence is denied, it must of consequence be supposed, that he either *cannot*, or, though he *can*, it is not his choice to exert that Dominion : If either of these suppositions is admitted, that right of Dominion will be useless and of none effect, and mankind must be deprived of the happy consequences flowing from it ; I mean God's Care and Preservation : And the obligation it lays upon them of worshipping him as their Creator, must by this means be entirely superseded : But besides ; if it is said, *he cannot*, his Omnipotence is denied ; and if it is allowed that *he can*, but does not, his Goodness, his Holiness, and his Justice, and indeed all his other Attributes are denied : But who can be guilty of so shocking, so blasphemous a thought ? For if an earthly Parent thinks himself obliged to exert the utmost of his endeavours to promote the happiness of his Children ; “ Is it not an impeachment of God's Goodness ; is it not the high-
“ est

“ est Impiety to suppose, that as soon as he has
 “ made any man, he dismisses him immedi-
 “ ately out of his hands, and abandons him
 “ without a design to answer his Prayers, or
 “ take any farther notice of him in his passage
 “ through this world, or to accommodate the
 “ Dispensations of Providence to his Wants
 “ and Deportment * ?”

But the enemies of our Religion tell us,
 “ that, by insisting on his Providence, we as-
 “ cribe things in themselves absurd to the De-
 “ ity.” They think that an *All-wise* God could
 frame and order the whole system of the world
 in such a manner, as that it might regularly
 perform its various motions, without the neces-
 sity of his interposing to direct or change them :
 They say, “ the greater the Wisdom of an A-
 “ gent, the *greater* should be the Uniformity
 “ of his Designs; and Effects in general are
 “ proportional to their Causes : If there is an
 “ Imperfection in the Effect, so must there be
 “ in the Cause : But the Necessity of a Parti-
 “ cular Providence implies Imperfection in the
 “ Effect of Creation, and consequently a De-
 “ fect of Wisdom or Power in the Cause, the
 “ Creator himself.” I answer, It might per-

* *Seed*, Vol. I. pag. 153.

haps be sufficient to say, *Perfection belongs to the Creator alone*; but I add, had the works of his Creation been made up of mere Matter, which is inert and void of every active Property, there had been some shew of reason in what they say; but as it has pleased him to exert his Goodness by the Creation of Beings invested with the Capacity of chusing and refusing; *Beings* whose Intentions and Designs are continually varying; God, to prevent those Irregularities that unavoidably flow from the Mutability of our Tempers, and our general proneness to Evil, must of consequence constantly interpose himself. Besides, as it is a Maxim generally allowed, *that the Deity can do Nothing that is inconsistent or absurd*; so is it the *greatest Absurdity* to suppose that he could confine the Actions of Free-Agents to certain, fixed, pre-established Rules.

But I now beg leave to appeal to Sacred Writ, where the various and wonderful Dispensations of Providence are painted in the most lively and engaging colours. *It is the Lord that feedeth the fowls of the air*: By his means the Lillies grow, and are clad and arrayed, so as to appear in greater lustre than the greatest of Kings in all his majesty and glory: And if the
death

death of a trifling Sparrow does not happen unnoticed, nor the hairs of the Peasant's head, any more than the Prince's, fall unnumbered; it will readily be allowed, that it is *the Lord that bleffeth men with the fruit of their labours and endeavours in the Field, and in every thing they put their hands unto: It is he that considereth the Poor, and relieveth him in time of Trouble; that preserveth and keepeth him alive and bleffeth him upon the earth, and delivereth him not into the hand of his enemy; that strengtheneth him upon his bed of languishing, and maketh all his bed in his sickness: It is the Lord likewise that killeth and maketh alive; it is he that bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up: And, to the point in hand, it was the Lord that plagued Pharaoh and his house with great Plagues: the hand of the Lord was also upon the Cattle in the land of Egypt, upon the Horses, upon the Asses, upon the Camels, upon the Oxen, and upon the Sheep; so that there was a very grievous Murrain. As the Providence of God is thus deducible, as well from Reason as Scripture; may we not, without doing violence either to his Goodness or his Justice, go a step farther and say, that the Distemper which now rages amongst our Cattle is likewise from the hand of the Lord?*

Seeing

Seeing therefore that the Lord hath visited us with this remarkable Calamity, I shall endeavour to shew that it is designed for our good.

We may be assured that he has not sent his Messenger upon a vain and trifling errand, but with a design of reprovng and turning us from the error of our ways. What use can these his fore Visitations be of, unless we sensibly know and feel them? Where the advantage, if we neglect and overlook, and even take pains to forget them? Where, if we endeavour to drown our sorrow, and take away the taste of the Phiol of God's wrath, by means which will add greatly to its bitterness? Where, if we swerve from our obedience to his Commands, and instead of giving God's sanctifying Spirit a seasonable opportunity of difusing his divine and healing rays, we diligently, *but scandalously*, make some worldly business the *chief* object of our care? When a man thus, in the time of adversity, neglects the great duty of Consideration, gives a loose to his Inclinations and inordinate Lusts, avoids the sight of *his* Dispensations who superintends all our actions, and turns a deaf ear to the Admonitions of Providence; *he* is of all men most miserable, since he despises *that* which God Almighty sends,

sends, as the most effectual means of leading him to Repentance. But I am addressing myself to those of whom better things are hoped: And since God hath been graciously pleased to make use of this method to bring us to a true sense of our Duty, let these fatherly Chastisements have their due effect upon us. Be it our chief business diligently and with great sincerity to examine into the state of our Souls: Let us consult that faithful Monitor, our Conscience, that we may know what Crimes have brought down this Judgment upon us? What Temptations have assaulted us with the greatest success? Call to mind what solemn professions you have made to renew your baptismal Vows, and how often and how dangerously you have relapsed. Let these Considerations prevail upon you to turn unto the Lord your God with all your heart; so shall you be again received into the Favour of that God whom you so often and so grievously offended; so will he cease to plague you with Diseases and sundry kinds of Death; *for he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men**; *but is a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to Anger and of great Kindness†*. As this behaviour is

* Lam. 3. 3.

† Nehem. 9. 17.

the most rational, so will it be, through the Merits of our dear Redeemer, a most acceptable reparation with Almighty God ; for hereby we acknowledge ourselves to be his Creatures, that we are accountable for every Crime we commit, for every breach and neglect of his most righteous Laws; and that we can expect to be exempt, neither from Suffering nor Sorrow, so long as we continue in a state of Disobedience to him: Thus shall we also arrive at that great Mystery of *knowing ourselves*, of acknowledging that in God *we live, move, and have our being*, and shall at last be ready, whatever we receive from the hands of God, to say, *it is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good* *.

But the good design of Almighty God, in pouring down his Afflictions upon us, will farther appear, if we make a short comparison between the Effects of Prosperity and Adversity. Health, Ease, and Plenty, and the other Pleasures of Life, are too apt to wean us from the exercise of Religious Duties, to impose upon our Senses, and make us solicitous for, and set our Affections upon them: “ They seize the
“ whole Man, and give him no leisure for dis-
“ charging the Offices of Life † :” For Blind-

* 1 Sam. 3. 18.

† Spectator.

“ nefs of Heart is almost the inseparable Com-
 “ panion of Prosperity ; the Vigour of the Soul
 “ is relaxed, and the bright Beams of Faith are
 “ quite obscured : Pleased with the gay thoughts
 “ of being happy, we have no desire to search
 “ after Wisdom : Satisfied with the Abundance
 “ of Enjoyments, which are but for a season,
 “ we take no care for those that are Eternal :
 “ Our Salvation is neglected ; God is removed
 “ far from our Thoughts, and the Heart cor-
 “ rupted with Sloth and Inactivity, spreads a
 “ Cloud over all the Powers of the Soul, like
 “ those waters, which, being pent up and with-
 “ out motion, emit vapours which darken all
 “ the places round about.” It is not so when
 we are visited with Afflictions and an adverse
 Fortune : *These* bring back the Soul to Reason,
 and make it reflect, and descend into itself ; and,
 having shewn it the Deceits of the World, and
 the Uneasiness consequent upon the pursuit of
 transitory Pleasures, they set this more refined
 and valueable part of us upon looking out for
 some more stable Refuge, *for something* that
 more deserves our Care, for something that
 shall put us in possession of the most exalted,
 sublime, and lasting Enjoyments, *those Rivers*
of Pleasure, which flow at God’s right hand for

evermore. For the truth of this we have the undoubted testimony of Sacred Writ; for, says holy *David*, *before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now have I kept thy word.*—And again,—*It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy Statutes.*—Thus shall we attain to true, religious Wisdom, and, by a discernment peculiar to the favourites of Heaven alone, be able to discover his *Love* in *Chastisement*, and to distinguish those things that are calculated for our Good, from *those* that tend to our inevitable Destruction.

I come now to shew,

II. What use we ought to make of them, and how we may promote our own real Interest by them.

God's Intention, in afflicting us, seems to be no other than that of bringing us to a State of Consideration.—So productive of Happiness is this Duty of *Consideration* in the Days of Anguish and Sorrow, that we are advised, by the wisest of Men, *in the time of Adversity to consider* *. The Prophet *Joel* too, having denounced God's Judgments to his Countrymen, commands them *to sanctify a Fast, to call a so-*

* Ecclef. 7. 14.

lemn Assembly, to gather the Elders and all the Inhabitants of the Land into the House of the Lord, and to cry unto the Lord, beseeching him, not to give his Heritage to reproach, nor to permit the Heathen to rule over them, nor to say, Where is now their God? As therefore the day of the Lord is come as a Destruction from the Almighty, is no less heavy upon US, at this Time, than it was upon God's own peculiar People, in the Days of the Prophet: As we hear of nothing but Decays, Diseases, and Complaining in our Streets; have we not the greatest reason, since such a conduct will certainly avert the Judgments of the Lord, to consider our Ways, and to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God? Ought we not, as he is a God of infinite Mercy as well as Power, to trust in him under his severest Judgments, and, in the days of Travail and Sorrow, to submit ourselves wholly to his holy Will and Pleasure? And, though no National Fast is publicly appointed by our Superiors, may we not without the imputation of Hypocrisy, nay, is it not our Duty to practise more than usual degrees of Abstinence and Self-denial, and to be more chaste and holy in all manner of Conversation? Especially since the Lord hath told us, that in such a case,

a case, *he will be jealous for his Land, and pity his People.* It seems clear then that the use we ought to make of Chastisements and Afflictions is, *to bear the Rod, and know who it is that hath appointed it**: For, as a very eminent Author † expresses himself, “ all the kind Influences of Heaven, which supply our Wants and fill our Hearts with Food and Gladness, are owing to the good Providence which commands Nature to give her Increase; and *those Disorders of Nature*, which inflict the World with Famines, *Pestilence*, and Earthquakes, are the Effects of God’s Anger and Displeasure, and are ordered by him for the Punishment of a wicked World.” Nor is it to be doubted, may we add, but that the *late Rebellion, the long continuance of an expensive War, and the still more dangerous continuance of a Plague amongst our Cattle*, are Punishments inflicted upon us for our Offences; and that they had already ceased, had we but ceased to do Evil, did we not still wallow in our Wickedness: And it is no less certain, that if we persevere in this impenitent State, we must expect to remain objects of God’s just Wrath and heavy Indignation. To make a right Use

* Mich. 6. 9.

† Sherlock on Providence.

of our Afflictions therefore, we should be studious not to thwart God's most gracious Designs, which are to make us truly sensible of and sorry for our former Sins, and, at the same time, to produce in us a thorough Change and Reformation. But one of the likeliest Motives to prevail upon us to make a right Use of Afflictions, is a just Consideration of the Means the Almighty has made use of to reform us. When *David*, by numbering the People, had offended the God of *Israel*, a Prophet was sent to tell him, *chuse thee either three years of Famine, or three months to be destroyed before thy Foes, or else three days the Sword of the Lord, even the Pestilence in the Land. Advise and see what word I shall bring again to him that sent me.* *David* chose to fall into the hands of the Living God, and not into those of Men: Whence several useful Inferences might be drawn; but the following seems the most nearly to concern us, *viz.* that God used but one method to bring *David* to a sense of his iniquities; whereas to us who are hardened in wickedness, who have our *Consciences*, as it were, *seared with a hot iron**, God, who is

* 1 Tim. 4. 2.

willing that all should repent and live, hath used great variety of means to bring us to a true sense of our Impieties. What great reason have we therefore to withdraw ourselves from the world, to commune with our own hearts, and to turn us from the evil of our ways, that iniquity may not be our ruin? For then, though his Judgements may not be immediately averted, shall we be ready to break out in those noble and exalted expressions of the Prophet, *Although the Fig-tree shall not blossom, nor the Fruit be in the Vines; though the Labour of the Olive-tree shall fail, and the Fields shall yield no Meat; though the Flock shall be cut off from the Fold, and there be no Herd in the Stall; yet will we rejoice in the Lord, we will joy in the God of our Salvation.**

When we have thus brought ourselves to acquiesce cheerfully in God, to trust in him for relief in all the Calamities with which he shall think fit to visit us; we should then enter into the firmest Resolutions of future obedience, lest God should again be provoked to afflict us, and his *Second* Visitation should be more grievous than the *First*.

* Habak. 3. 17, 18.

To enable us to perform our vows, we must *pray* to God for the assistance of his Holy Spirit; we must implore him to rule in our hearts, which are so deceitful, and to give us Power and Strength to fight against the World, the Devil, and our own corrupt Nature. We should lay a more than ordinary stress upon the performance of this Religious Duty, inasmuch as that *Prayer* contributes greatly to repair and rectify the human Soul; for in this Act of Piety and Devotion we call God to witness to the sincerity of our Intentions, lift up our hearts to Heaven, and dispossess ourselves of all our corrupt Thoughts and vile Affections: We use all our endeavours to mortify the Lusts of the Flesh, and to revive the Graces of the Spirit, to cloath ourselves with Humility and Faith, and Love, and the Fear of God. By thus approaching the Almighty's Throne shall Sinners have their Sins remitted, be sanctified with the kind Influences of God's Holy Spirit, supported in their Weakness, and strengthened in their sundry and manifold Temptations: And *all this* because in offering up their Petitions, they acknowledge that it is God alone, through Jesus Christ, "that can plow up the Heart by
" Afflictions, correct the past and prevent fu-

“ ture Sins, and renew and reduce their corrupt Nature to a conformity with his own.”

Abstinence, Self-denial, and a more solemn Humiliation, likewise tend greatly towards the advancement of Piety in the Soul ; for as Intemperance stupifies and blunts the edge of the Understanding ; so does a spare and simple Diet contribute not only to prolong Life, but likewise to preserve our rational Faculties, and keep them in a due preparation for the great business, which the Wise Author of our Being designed them for. How nigh a-kin to then, nay rather how much beneath the Brute is that Man, who enslaves and sacrifices his Soul to all those filthy Lusts which are in a continual war against it? Let us rather out of our Abundance, distribute to the relief of the Poor and Needy, and by degrees restrain our Appetites, that when our lives shall be purely spiritual, we may be able, without regret, to part with the objects of our sensual Pleasures. As we value the Welfare, the eternal Welfare of our Souls, let us be careful, neither too much to indulge our carnal Appetites, nor yet to hoard up those Riches which we cannot tell who shall gather ; for though we may be pleased in viewing our Bags of Gold while we live, yet what comfort can

can they administer when we must inevitably part with them? What satisfaction can they give, when the Soul is parting with its old companion the Body, and entering upon a new, unchangeable, eternal state of Happiness or Woe? But, to divert our minds from these hateful Vices of Luxury and Covetousness, let us turn our thoughts to another Religious Duty, which we must necessarily practise, before we can expect a blessing from God upon any of our other Endeavours; I mean that most darling Virtue, *Charity*, than which, considered as an act of Communicating and doing Good, there is no Duty that God has, in his Sacred Writings, so strictly enjoined. *If there be, says Moses, among you a poor man of thy brethren within any of thy gates, thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand up from thy poor brother: If thou givest him nought, it shall be a sin against thee; but if thou openest thine hand, God shall bless thee in all thy works.*

We may fast, may afflict our souls; but if we expect to have our Petitions heard, and our Iniquities forgiven, we must relieve the Oppressed, and judge the Fatherless; and then, *though our sins be as scarlet, shall they be white as snow.* But no where are the blessed consequences of Charity more beautifully expressed than by the

Prophet Isaiah.—*If, says he, thou deal thy bread to the Hungry, cover the Naked, and hide not thyself from thine own Flesh ; then shall thy Light break forth as the Morning, thy Health spring forth, thy Righteousness go before thee, and the Glory of the Lord be thy Rere-ward : If thou satisfy the hungry and afflicted Soul ; then shall thy Light rise in Obscurity, and thy Darkness be as the Noon-day ; and the Lord shall guide thee, satisfy thy Soul, and make fat thy Bones ; and thou shalt be like a watered Garden, and like a Spring whose Waters fail not.* What kind Encouragements these ! who can forbear breaking forth in the most ardent and lively Strains of Piety ? Who forbear crying unto the Lord in their Trouble, when he has promised to deliver them in their Distress ? And who can forbear performing those easy Conditions, upon which such glorious Rewards depend ?

If we then seriously endeavour to practise these Religious Duties, we may be assured that God will hasten to put a Period to our Afflictions, that he will have Compassion upon the Land, and pity his People, and make all things to work together for our good ; “ that all our
 “ Evils and Afflictions will conspire to promote
 “ our Happiness *many times* in this world, and
 “ make a sure addition to it in the next.”

To

To conclude : As we are assured that our Afflictions are intended to promote our true Interest, provided we make a right use of them ; what have we to do but to offer up ourselves, and all we have to God, to acknowledge our Offences, and confess that he is just in all his Ways ? What have we to do when we suffer in our Circumstances, and undergo the like Afflictions with *holy Job*, but to join with him also in that pious Declaration, *the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away : Blessed be the Name of the Lord !* Let us all then ingenuously acknowledge, that “ how
 “ mean or narrow soever our Circumstances are,
 “ they are still greater and better than we de-
 “ serve at the hands of God ; that how sharp
 “ soever our Afflictions are, they are far less
 “ than those that are due to us ; ” that we have the greatest reason *to consider our Ways*, and to humble ourselves under the mighty Judgments of the Lord ; especially, as he hath told us by his Apostle, that if we do this, *he will exalt us in due time*, and reward all our Sufferings *with a more exceeding and eternal weight of Glory*.

Which that He, &c.

THE END.

To conclude: As we are assured that our Affiliations are intended to promote our true Liberty, provided we make a right use of them; what have we to do but to offer up ourselves, and all we have to God, to acknowledge our Offences, and confess that he is just in all his Ways? What have we to do when we suffer in our Circumstances, and undergo the like Afflictions with Job? Not to join with him in that pious Declaration, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: Blessed be the Name of the Lord!" but rather in profound Acknowledgment, that "how great our sorrow, how our Circumstances are changed, will appear and better than we deserve at the hands of God; that how sharp our Afflictions, they are far less than we have are due to us;" that we have the greatest reason to confess our Wickedness, and to humble ourselves under the mighty Judgments of the Lord; especially, as he hath told us by his Prophets, that if we do thus he will exalt us in due time, and reward all our Sufferings with a more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

AMEN

WILLIAM H. C.

THE END

